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Bolivia Appeals to London Court To Block Sale of Guevara Diaries

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LA PAZ, Bolivia, July 7 — The Bolivian Government has appealed to British courts to block the scheduled July 16 auction of the diaries of the guerrilla leader Ernesto (Che) Guevara, which it says were stolen from Bolivian military archives.

"We want to provide more proof that the documents were robbed and exported illegally," Bolivia's Foreign Minister, Jorge Crespo, said in an interview Friday. "They are historical documents and belong to our national patrimony. It is part of international snobbery to want them as a relic. But they were stolen and we want them back."

The diaries came into the Government's hands after Major Guevara was captured and killed in October 1967 while trying to foment a guerrilla movement in the Bolivian mountains.

Appeal to Be Heard Monday

A London high court has already granted Bolivia an injunction preventing the sale by Sotheby's, the auction house. An appeal by Sotheby's against the ruling is to be heard on Monday.

In response, Bolivia has asked for a delay of the hearing until July 13, Mr. Crespo said.

The controversy over the manuscripts could lead to a sharp rise in the price, some officials here believe.

"It is shameful," said Mr. Crespo, who is coordinating Bolivia's legal battle. "But we have been informed that Sotheby's has now raised its base price from 350,000 pounds to 500,000 pounds — roughly from \$470,000 to \$700,000."

A spokesman for Sotheby's has denied that the documents were stolen. The company, however, has refused to disclose how it obtained the two notebooks and a set of loose pages that it is holding in its manuscript department. The present owner, a company statement said, "wishes to remain

anonymous."

"Although the diary texts have already been published in many languages, their value lies in the fact that these are not only the originals but also reportedly include several portions that were previously unknown."

The unpublished parts include the Argentine-born Cuban revolutionary's messages to Fidel Castro, the Cuban leader, and his comments on his own men, including Régis Debray, the French Marxist who joined Major Guevara and was later captured. Mr. Debray now works in Paris as counselor to President François Mitterrand.

Sources familiar with the text said that after Mr. Debray's arrest, Major Guevara made an entry about the Frenchman's courage and wrote, "A magnificent intellectual has been lost, but I doubt that he could become a good guerrilla."

The stir over the diaries, whose entries begin on Nov. 7, 1966, and end Oct. 7, 1967, two days before the guerrilla's death, is almost as old as the somewhat bedraggled pages themselves.

Journalists first saw the diaries on the day they also saw Major Guevara's body. A year later photocopies surfaced and were published in Cuba and the United States.

C.I.A. Involvement Reported

According to some reports, one set of copies received by the United States was obtained with the help of the Central Intelligence Agency, while Antonio Arguedas, Bolivia's Minister of Interior at the time, told reporters he had sent a set to Mr. Castro, along with Major Guevara's severed hands.

Mr. Arguedas was quoted as saying he had received copies of the diaries from the C.I.A.

The notebooks were last seen by reporters in Bolivia in June 1968, just before their publication. They were then



Magnum / René Burri

Ernesto Guevara

believed to have been placed in a shoebox in the offices of Bolivia's intelligence section at the La Paz headquarters of the high command.

In May, when plans to auction the documents were announced, the Bolivian military leaders were embarrassed by the discovery that the originals were no longer in place.

Members of the Government, which includes two Communist Cabinet members and several people who have spent time in Cuba, have said they were furious about "the theft." The Government ordered an army investigation which has apparently been delayed by the abduction and subsequent release of Bolivia's President last week.

Mr. Crespo said the army believed the documents "were stolen by Col. Luis Arce Gómez," who headed the intelligence section between 1980 and 1982.

He is widely held to have been deeply involved in Bolivia's vast cocaine traffic and has fled the country.

Complicating the search is the fact that close to 30 military officers have been in charge of the country's intelligence section since 1968. "Two of them are dead," said Mr. Crespo, "I would not be surprised if one of the dead men gets the blame."